

Alternate Fingerings Part 2

Incorporating the Four Pentatonic Fingerings

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Where we left off

Last time we stretched you, and in a very literal sense. We introduced you to a couple of ways of fingering the first half of the **Clifford Brown** Standard "Joy Spring," using the **FFcP** closed position approach referenced on the JazzMando website (and soon in the book "Getting Into Jazz Mandolin") <http://jazzmando.com/ffcp.shtml> and explained: if you want to move confidently into the higher frets this is a comfortably friendly way to do it.

A little harmonic analysis

Looking at the song again, notice in the first 8 measures, we have two tonal centers, the key of **F major**, the key of **Ab Major**, and a couple of measures of chords that form a "Turnaround" that transition back to the key of **F**. We'll table the latter of for the moment; the fascinating use of **Turnaround** chords is a topic unto itself. Notice in measure 5, with the introduction **Bbm7** and **Eb7**, we have a brief but established 'ii V7' chord progression that prepares for the key of **Ab Major**. We don't actually root ourselves there (pun intended), but if you started the next measure with an **Ab**, you'd be perfectly correct. In retrospect, at the end of the phrase in the 8th measure, when you look back, you see the preceding 4 chords, **Am7 Ab7 Gm7** and **C7** are actually bringing you back to the original key of **F major**.

Maybe this all seems so cerebral, but when you play and listen to the above, the **Ab major** is entirely suitable, offering you far better improvisational fodder with an **Ab scale**, **Ab, Bb C, Db, Eb, F, G, Ab**. All those notes fit nicely in those measures. Certainly, **scale patterns** are a great way to figure out what notes are appropriate. Let's digress for a moment and talk about two other ways of extracting good notes for improvisation, **Arpeggios** and **Pentatonic Scales**.

Chords in a line

Arpeggios are simply chords spelled out melodically. You could look at these eight measures and just play all the notes of the chord for your melody, **F, A, C, E**, (Fmaj7), **D, F, A, C** (Dm7), **G, Bb, D, F** (Gm7) etc., and each of the notes would be entirely fitting, but arguably not very musical. Melodies need at least occasional stepwise motions, and chords by nature skip around entirely too much to be satisfying. You can sprinkle them in as melodic nuggets once in a while, but not always. Playing chord arpeggios will make you sound like you are playing, well... arpeggios. By the same token, using scales, notes consecutively can be just as unmusical. The best thing you can do is mix these up a bit.

Pentatonic fortune

This is where a musical treasure, the **Pentatonic Scale** can come in very handy in jazz. You may already be quite intimate with these, albeit in the common "Bluegrass" keys (based on the open strings of the mandolin), and if you've taken to heart our system of learning all 12 keys easily (see **Developing Pentatonics for Jazz**, <http://mandolinsessions.com/aug07/Eschliman.html>), you are entirely ready to embrace a rich opportunity for effective improvisation. You'll also be using the tricks of the jazz greats, **Coltrane, Tyner, Parker**, etc.

What is a **Pentatonic**? Yes in the **key of F** its five notes, **F, G, A, C, D**, but harmonically, it's **root, 3rd, 5th**, and some benign, connecting "bridge" notes (2nd, 6th) or **Passing Tones**. It's a jumping off point you can supplement later with important "gravity notes" the **7th** and **4th (Eb & Bb)**, some colorful chord extensions, **#11 (B natural)**, **b9 (Gb)**, but it's a great place for a solid tactile base.

Folk musicians have known this for centuries, but unlike jazz, they can get away with just one or two (maybe three) in the same song, and that's all they ever need. In the more complex jazz vocabulary, you really need the additional tension and color notes, but this can even be a gateway to those. Plus you can have 3, 4, 5, probably even a lot more tonal centers in one song. Let us reinforce the notion that you really need all 12 keys to be comfortable for you to really use the **Pentatonics**.

We've already shown you in "**Joy Spring**" two tonal centers of **F and Ab major**. The pentatonic scales for these would be here:

F Maj Pent

1st FFcP

Ab Maj Pent

3rd FFcP

Notice, you have notes capable of spelling out the of arpeggiated chords. Out of the **Ab Pentatonic** scale, **Ab, Bb, C, Eb, F**, you've got much of the **Bbm7** chord (sharing the **Bb, F**, and **Ab**, you can add a **Db**) and **Eb7** (sharing the **Eb, Bb**, you can add the **G** and **Db**), but most importantly you have the **root, 3rd** and **5th** of the inferred tonal center of **Ab**). Again the Pentatonic is a starting point; a really good (and hopefully familiar) start.

Let's move on to the next 8 measures of the song and see in a parallel form we also have two tonal centers in the keys of **Gb** and **A major**:

The **Bm7** and **E7** are your **'ii V7'** in the **key of A**. Again, they set up the key, and even though the next 4 chords transition you back to the home **key of Gb**, you still have to choose improvisational material to fit the key of A. Let's look at possible **FFcP** fingerings for the next two **Pentatonic** resources:

Going beyond.

We already mentioned some notes you'd add. The notes to round out what would have been arpeggiated chords are in the scale, but with the pentatonic scales, you are emphasizing the tonal center notes. There's nothing that says you can't play notes of the chords alone, but if you familiarize yourself with the home key pentatonics, you have a solid home base to work around and come back to.

Running on all Fours.

What we really like in the examples of above are the fact that you use all four **FFcP** positions, **1st**, **2nd**, **3rd**, and **4th**. This really drives home the incredible versatility in this system. The upper octave of the **F Pentatonic** pictured as a **1st FFcP** would be a **4th FFcP**. The lower octave of the **3rd FFcP Ab Pentatonic** pictured would be a **1st FFcP**. Of course you can move anything up the fretboard and start with any other **FFcP**, and if these are familiar to you, your creative process can be lightspeed faster. Plus, if you carry within brain and finger some semblance of the concept of root, 3rd, 5th (chord tones), you begin to develop a subconscious ability to improvise with more effective notes. Melodies literally appear at your fingertips without intellectualizing.

Also, no need to be intimidated by horn keys anymore. You just played the key of **Gb**, and if you hollered out at a bluegrass Jam you wanted to play a tune in the key of **Gb**, they'd all look at you as if you were from Mars.

If you haven't already, go to the JazzMando website and download the two page PDF that gives you exercises to help develop an expanded view of the Pentatonics:

FFcP Pentatonics: <http://www.jazzmando.com/print/FFcPPentatonic.pdf>



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Advanced note Post Script

Okay so it's bugging the spots off you that I'd include in the above an **Ab7** as a chord in the key of **F Major**. *This is advanced theory so if you're squeamish about it, don't read any further....*

An **Ab7** is a **Tri-tone Substitution** of a **D7** which is a **Secondary Dominant** preparation for the **minor ii7** chord (**Gm7**) that prepares the **dominant** of the key, **C7**. And the same for **A7** in the key of **Gb** It's really an enharmonic **Tri-tone Substitution** for an **Eb7**, which is a **Secondary Dominant Preparation** for the **minor ii7** chord (**Abm7**) that prepares the **dominant** of the key, **Db7**.

You had to ask, didn't you?...